

REUNION TIPS AND CHANGES TO EXPECT

CHANGES

Self: How have you changed? Physical appearance, attitude, behavior, independence? Give some examples of these changes.

Spouse: What changes can you image may have taken place in your service member while she/he was away? Perhaps in some of the same ways you have changed? Physical appearance, attitude, behavior, independence. How do you think you will react?

Relationship: Until you have weathered a separation from your spouse, you don't know if your relationship can make it. You might be sure intellectually, but unsure emotionally. Any apprehensions caused by tentative emotions can add to the stress of reunion, so don't worry about any questions emotions may bring up.

TRUST

Did each of you follow through on promises such as writing and calling? Sometimes it only takes one Soldier's reception of a "Dear John" or "Dear Susan" letter to get everyone in their unit worrying about their marriage. Be aware of this and understand reassurances of love and commitment may need to be stated.

INDEPENDENCE

Young spouses often develop the skills and abilities needed to keep things running at home while their spouses are deployed. This can frighten returning service members who discover their missing skills have been matched while they were away. Couples can talk about the difference between being needed and being wanted.

HOME LIFE

You may have simplified life a bit during your spouse's deployment. Maybe paper plates or ordering out have replaced your old dinner routine. Maybe you've returned to school or now have a job. Maybe new friends now fill your time. Maybe you've moved or bought a house. How do you think your spouse will feel coming home to new surroundings? Be aware that your spouse may need some time to get used to the "new" you.

CONTROL

Some may discover during the deployment how much they like exercising control over household decisions and don't look forward to sharing any of them. Others look forward to the day when they can hand those decisions back over. Still others fall in between. Things may be different after deployment so be ready for any "responsibilities" negotiation that may need to take place.

RETURNING SPOUSES

Returning service member spouses are coming from an environment where they were told when to get up, when to work, what to eat, where to go on leave, and what movies to watch. They won't be accustomed to watching television, and may at times become absorbed in their viewing. When they were deployed, they didn't have a place to call their own, so for a time they may want to come home, lock the door, and be by themselves. Sleep may be difficult because it is too quiet or the bed is too big or too comfortable. Simply be aware of this and help them through the change.

TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL REUNION

- Agree on plans for homecoming day and the next few days or weeks. Where do the children fit in? Are parents or in-laws coming?
- Realize the day of homecoming is very stressful. Returning service member spouses have had little sleep and lots of food, so expect them to be fatigued, and not "banquet" hungry. You may be tired from homecoming preparations, and your children may be excited and want to act up. Accept and discuss any of these noticeable physical, mental, or emotional conditions.
- Plan time as a couple and family with the children.
- Communicate about events that took place during the deployment. Reread letters and bring up any questions you may have about things that took place in the field and at home.
- Give each other time and space to adjust to one another.
- Respect each other and the jobs you did. Avoid the "I had it worse" game.
- Make time to rest.
- Negotiate the number of social events you might attend. Some returning service spouses want to simply stay at home. Others want to paint the town in celebration. Find out where you are.
- Assess how you handled the deployment. Discuss what went well and what you may want to change the next time.
- Explain new rules or changes in the family's schedule.

TIPS FOR REESTABLISHING INTIMACY

- Some spouses want to be courted again before they feel comfortable in resuming sexual intimacy. Others want to have sex right away. Others are a mixture of these two. The key is to let each other know how you feel about your sexual reunion. If necessary, you may need to negotiate agreed upon plans for sexual reunion.
- Intimacy reducers include: alcohol, fear of unintended pregnancy, out-of-bed children scurrying around the house, nearby parents who may interrupt, unresolved hurt and anger, and distrust.
- Communicate your love to your spouse.
- Allow each other space.
- Allow each other to work on romance and emotional, sexual intimacy.
- Talking about sex can be fun itself. It is the best single method of improving your sex life.

INGREDIENTS FOR A SUCCESSFUL MARRIAGE

- Trust
- Communication
- Ability to change
- Shared values/religious beliefs
- Commitment agreement on life goals
- Playfulness/humor
- Flexibility